

Literature Review

Leo Kanner, an Austrian-American psychiatrist, wrote his observations of several case histories in his book titled Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact. A boy in his studies named Donald T., age 5, showed atypical behavior. Kanner (1943) noted “he gave no heed to the presence of other children but went about his favorite pastimes. Walking off from the children if they were so bold as to play with him. If a child took a toy from him he passively permitted it”(p. 244). Donald, referred to as Don throughout the writing, fell within the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum disorder.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is an umbrella term that includes diagnoses such as Autism, Asperger syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorders (Frith, U., 2003). Autism affects an estimated 1 in 69 children with individuals exhibiting behavioral, developmental, and cognitive deficits. Although symptoms vary within a spectrum, core symptoms consist of challenges in social communication and repetitive behaviors (Frith, U., 2003). Symptoms begin early in life and interfere with day to day activities. Aside from other significant abnormalities in behavior, social skills is a key area affected by ASD, which can eventually impact social interaction in school age children (Aron-Cohen, S., 1995).

An indicator of Autism is the poor connection with others, or moreso the lack of interest to create one (Frith, U., 2003). Individuals have a hard time taking notice of the social world around them and a harder time interpreting it. Theory of Mind, the idea that others have different thoughts, perceptions, and intentions than one's own is a concept hard to grasp (Aron-Cohen, S., 1995). It is the inability for such individuals to understand that others have their own agendas. Causing failure to accommodate others, predict behaviors or simply please them. It suggests that

the difficulties that come with ASD such as problems with social interaction, communication, and behavioral flexibility begin at the very beginning of human development (Aron-Cohen, S., 1995).

With such difficulty in social function, it's important to consider how ASD individuals would react in the face of conformity. Conformity, the behavior in compliance with socially accepted standards or norms, is a theoretical construct in social psychology. It should be predicted that Autism traits negatively correlate with the likelihood to conform to social pressure (Carter, A.S., Davis, N.O., Klin, A., & Volkmar, F.R., 2005). Moreso, Autism individuals should demonstrate resistance to conform to a social majority (Carter, A.S *et al*, 2005). However, little research has been done on whether autism is associated with nonconformity disposition of Autism.

In fact, past studies have shown inconsistent and troubling research for conformity in ASD individuals. Typical research for conformity consists of participants placed in a controlled group setting where confederates will unanimously express an inaccurate belief that is contradictory to the participants. Individuals will then alter their judgement to align with the groups' (Asch, 1995). A study done in Sheffield Hallam University, used a variation of this method and found results that suggest that social conformity is weakened in people with ASD (Yafai, A. F., Verrier, D., & Reidy, L., 2014). In a controlled setting, the researcher advised the participant on what the "majority" believes instead of using confederates.. Information said to be suggested by other people had a higher conformity rate than information given by computer programs.

Another study tested the likelihood of conformity in ASD individuals with a memory test (Lazzaro, S.C., Weidinger, L., Cooper, R.A. et al., 2018). The sample size consisted of 45 participants who were prompted to view words and asked if the words in the study were from a previous or new set. Participants were part of a group of 5, the other being confederates. No difference was found for social conformity in ASD individuals compared to those in the neurotypical group. Both groups changed their judgment to align with the majority approximately two times out of three

Unfortunately, flaws can be found in both studies and adaptations can help determine and eliminate confounding variables. Within the first study, a physically present group of confederates should be used. Having the researcher tell the participant what the majority has answered can display itself as a power authority influence. Increasing the likelihood for the participant to feel like the researcher is urging them to answer in the way he wishes they do so. The number of confederates, or “degree of socialness” could also be varied to further show the extent of conformity in autistic traits.

As for adaptations to the second study, if indeed ASD and neurotypical individuals exhibit the same level of conformity future studies should examine if they conform for the same reasons. Whether it's the desire to fit in (normative social influence) or to be accurate (informational social influence) (Asch, S., 1955). Studies should also vary within a wide age group of ASD participants. Compared to children, Autistic adults may have adapted to conformity as a social strategy. Further research should be done to thoroughly and accurately find the association between Autistic individuals and social conformity. Factors such as population sample, age group, degree of socialness, and the physical presence of others should

confirm how susceptible Autism individuals are to conform to social pressures and achieve solid results .

References

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